

S POTLIGHT ON DISTRICT 4

SUMMER, 2002



DEAR NEIGHBORS...

This was a challenging budget. Nonetheless, I was pleased we were able to protect and enrich that which is most important to all of us - education, the environment, housing and public safety. The County Fiscal Year 03 budget includes \$624 million for school construction, including six new gyms. We will also reduce class size in kindergarten through second grade and offer all-day kindergarten at 56 elementary schools.

Getting around Montgomery County - commuting as well as shopping and leisure - is a high priority on nearly everyone's list these days. To ease traffic, the Council approved \$62 million for Montrose Parkway, retained the Fare Share transit program, which provides half-price fares on Ride-On buses and increased senior transportation. To make travel safer, the Council funded additional red-light cameras.

To protect sensitive environmental areas, the Council approved \$3 million in the coming year for Legacy Open Space. And because health-care is vital to every citizen's quality of life, the Council funded \$1 million for the African American and Latino Health Initiatives and expanded Baby Steps and Healthy Families Home Visiting programs. To ease the affordable housing shortage, the Council set aside \$15 million for housing programs.

We knew going in it would be a tight budget year, but the Council succeeded in preserving vital programs and services for its citizens.



**COUNCILMEMBER
MARILYN J. PRAISNER**

This year's Strawberry Festival at Sandy Spring was a hit with the kids.



S POTLIGHT ON DISTRICT 4

SCHOOLS TO GET GYMS

When I agreed to co-sponsor a bill to increase the Recordation Tax, besides making sure the money would be spent on school construction, I insisted on targeting a portion to build additional school gyms. Now Montgomery County Public Schools will restart the program to build gyms at elementary schools. I am thrilled my efforts paid off so soon in District Four -- **Drew Elementary School** will be one of the first beneficiaries. All remaining elementary schools without gyms should get back in the queue including seven in District 4: **Bel Pre, Brookhaven, Cannon Road, Cloverly, Fairland, Stonegate, and Strathmore.**

Thanks to our County's persistence in Annapolis working to amend the Thornton Commission recommendations, we also received \$8.6 million that will go straight into the classroom. I spent the last two years representing the Maryland Association of Counties on the Thornton Commission and worked hard to assure Montgomery County benefited from this statewide initiative.

In total, the Council approved a \$1.4 billion school budget. This will bring all-day kindergarten and reduced class size in first and second grades to several more elementary schools in District 4: **Cannon Road, Galway, Fairland, Forest Knolls, Page, Rock Creek Valley and Drew.**

In addition, the Council appropriated \$920,000 for the new Downcounty Consortium, which includes **Blair, Kennedy and**



Students from Briggs Chaney Middle School, trained as environmental peer educators, monitor stream quality in the Paint Branch. The County recently received federal funds to help restore fish habitats and improve water quality there.

Wheaton High Schools. In September, **Wheaton and Einstein High Schools** will open "9th grade academies" featuring smaller learning communities to allow more individualized attention. The money will fund the planning of special programs and coordinators for those programs at each high school in the consortium.



EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE WATERSHED PAY OFF

An eight-step program to clean up the Anacostia watershed in Montgomery County is helping to revitalize fish habitats and control erosion. The program was funded with fed-

eral dollars, and is the first such partnership between federal and local governments.

Students at Briggs Chaney Middle School act as peer educators and have been trained by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in environmental awareness so that they may spread the knowledge of how to care for sensitive watersheds.

EAST COUNTY SERVICES CENTER AND FAIRLAND REC CENTER OPEN



Councilmember Marilyn Praisner is joined by Center Director Anise Key Brown and East County citizens to help celebrate the grand opening of the East County Services Center.

After welcoming the new East County Services Center in April (left), East County community members were also able to celebrate the long-awaited opening of the Fairland Recreation Center in May. Construction problems had delayed the opening.

The East County Services Center, at 3300 Briggs Chaney Road, offers a variety of services to citizens in the East County Region. You can contact the center at 240-777-8400.

The 26,300 square-foot recreation center includes a gymnasium, meeting rooms along with a game room, exercise room, art studio, a computer room and community room. The Center plans to host after-school programs for grades one through 12 on various evenings and rooms will be available for community functions. For more information on programs at the center, call 240-777-6820.

NEW TOUCH-SCREEN VOTING DEBUTS

New touch-screen voting machines will be in place for the September primary.



The new voting system employs a flat screen used on some computers. Voters activate the system with an access card similar to ones used for automated teller machines.

Voters insert their card, select a language, touch start, read instructions and touch a box next to the candidates of their choice. Voters can easily change their vote by going back and touching the box next to their correct choice. The system does not allow over-votes.

The machines were tested in April, when the public school students elected their representative to the Board of Education. The tryout

uncovered a few bugs, which we're working to resolve for the upcoming primary election on September 10. The general election is November 5.

I am confident voters will find the new touch-screen system efficient and user-friendly. The American Council of the Blind helped evaluate the new voting system, which can assist voters with voice cues, keyboard controls and audio.

This year, the voting machines will provide information in Spanish as well as English. In the future, the County hopes to add other languages, as well. My committee will continue to monitor the progress.

HOMELAND SECURITY TO PROTECT CITIZENS

Heightened emergency preparation in the wake of September 11 is now a way of life especially for those of us living in the Washington metropolitan area. To address these issues, the County has implemented a variety of new and enhanced programs.

The Council approved a new bio-terrorism team, as an integral part of the County's effort to help public health officials better respond to incidents of terrorism or other significant emergencies.

Security at public facilities will be enhanced, including Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission facilities, security cameras in selected parking garages and a new canine unit for bomb security.

In addition, the County is submitting a request for federal funds, totaling more than \$16 million, for



additional homeland security measures, including:

- \$1.17 million for enhanced bomb squad and HAZMAT equipment, such as vehicles, protective suits, and communications systems;

- \$767,000 bio-terrorism response center that will take advantage of the County's proximity to biomedical and intelligence assets, including NIH and FDA, to provide local police, emergency rescue and public health workers with state-of-the-art bioterrorism response capabilities;

- \$5.7 million request for an emergency radio system for Ride On to enhance the bus fleet's security and communications system;

- \$750,000 for a tone and voice alert system for firefighters, emergency medical workers, disaster volunteers and public health personnel, and a "blast fax" communications system to alert physicians and nurses, hospitals, civic associations and other organizations.

ALLIED HONORS PRAISNER WITH IDA MAE GARROTT AWARD

I was recently honored by Allied Civic Group when they presented me with the Ida Mae Garrott award, which is given to a public servant who embodies the best qualities and record of service on behalf of Montgomery County communities.

In presenting the award, Cynthia Rubenstein, Allied Civic Group president, said the group admires Councilmember Praisner for "intelligence, integrity and independence."

Allied Civic is a sixty-six year-old umbrella civic group representing communities including Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Wheaton, Kensington, Silver Spring and Aspen Hill.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IS HIGH PRIORITY

With pedestrian fatalities in the County exceeding homicides, it was clearly time to take action. As part of this effort, I served as the Council's representative on the County's Blue Ribbon Panel on Pedestrian and Traffic Safety.

As a result of the Panel's recommendations, the County Executive appointed Lori Gillen, a senior-level official in the County Executive's Office, to coordinate ongoing pedestrian and traffic safety activities.

The County will also establish a permanent pedestrian safety advisory board, on which I will serve, to keep the Panel's blueprint on track.

Be on the lookout for paddle signs, designed to boost driver awareness of pedestrians in crosswalks (see below), marking pedestrian crosswalks at six locations around the County as a pilot. The County will assess the effectiveness of the paddle signs over the next month. I would appreciate your reactions.



Leisure World residents chat with Councilmember Marilyn Praisner

COUNTY FOCUSES ON SENIORS

Our senior citizens worked hard to build the communities where we all live, work and play today. As the need for senior services has grown (seniors now make up 21% of County residents), the County has continued to provide more programs and services.

This year, the Council approved nearly \$4 million for an array of transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities, including:

- \$2.5 million for curb-to-curb transportation;
- Over \$8,000 for Ride-On bus transportation;
- Nearly \$2 million for Ride-On's Call-N-Ride program
- \$280,000 for assisted/escorted transportation; and
- Almost \$650,00 for

First Transit for trips to senior and community centers and grocery stores.

Helping seniors remain in Montgomery County is critical. The County is currently home to 40 senior apartment complexes. With the approval of another 14 senior housing projects, which include affordable housing, there will be more options for housing.

In addition, the County's Housing Policy calls for adding at least 200 affordable senior housing units each year.

The Council also approved \$28.4 million for aging and disability services. This includes in-home aide services for 650 seniors, respite care, nursing home ombudsman program and the Senior Food Program, which serves 4,000 nutritious meals each year to homebound seniors. Increases in all these programs will help eliminate waiting lists.



DISTRICT 4 TRANSPORTATION

DEVELOPMENT TAX TO FUND ROADS, TRANSIT

This year, the Council passed the first Countywide development impact tax on new development and earmarked the money for building more roads and expanding transit. By voting to pass the development impact tax, the Council is finally requiring development to pay its fair share. I am extremely proud the bill I originally introduced was the catalyst to break this decade-long deadlock. The tax is expected to raise \$6.5 million annually and will allow the County to double spending on transportation.

TRANSPORTATION POLICY REPORT

The Task Force on the Transportation Policy Report (TPR) has completed its report. This Countywide initiative is intended to identify what's needed to improve mobility in Montgomery County. The Council has been reviewing the report and anticipates making recommendations to add to its list of road, transit, pedestrian improvements. Information may be found at www.co.mo.md.us/council or by calling (240) 777-7910.

Here's the latest on transportation projects in District 4.

MD 28/MD 198 - (from Norbeck Road (MD 28) @ Georgia Avenue (MD 97) to the I-95 corridor in Prince George's County) is still being studied by the State Highway Administration (SHA) for widening. SHA conducted a public workshop on alternates for this project in June. Three alternates other than the master planned alignment were presented to the public. Since the project planning study began, I have repeatedly conveyed my concerns to SHA Administrator Parker Williams regarding the State's disregard of the Cloverly and Fairland Master Plans, which clearly call for a road designed to carry *local* east-west traffic. Despite public protest and Council efforts, SHA continues to entertain alternatives that address *regional* traffic problems and are inconsistent with the Master Plan.

I met with the regional heads of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army Corps of Engineers to educate them and to emphasize the far-reaching, multi-year, multi-agency efforts that have been taken to protect and restore the Upper Paint Branch Special Protection Area (SPA). My goal is to make these fed-

eral permitting agencies aware that Montgomery County has taken numerous steps to reverse the declining health of the stream system, including new environmental guidelines and regulations. All my Council colleagues concur that any alternatives for widening MD 198 must be consistent with the guidelines in the Cloverly and Fairland Master Plans and the goals of the Upper Paint Branch SPA and the Patuxent watershed.

The SHA project manager is Shawn Burnett at (410) 545-8531 or 800-548-5026, or by email at sburnett@sha.state.md.us.

Norbeck Road Extended—

This 2.95 mile long extension connecting Norbeck Road (MD 28) to Spencerville Road (MD 198) at New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650) should be complete by this December. Norwood Road between Ednor Road and New Hampshire Avenue re-opened July 11, 2002.

Reconstruction of the intersection of Layhill and Norbeck Road should be complete by the end of summer. This intersection will be fully signalized and will have through lanes and dedicated turning lanes when Norbeck Road Extended is open to traffic.

A separate project is currently underway in two locations to establish areas of upland wooded wetlands displaced by the road construction. These sites are located immediately adjacent to Bryants Nursery Road and near Batchellors Forest Road.

Old Columbia Pike Side-walks –The second phase of sidewalk construction from Nalls Lane to East Randolph Road has been pushed back to 2003 due to extensive utility relocation. A reconstruction project to improve safety at the intersection of Perrywood Road was removed from the Old Columbia Pike project and will be constructed separately as an intersection and spot improvement project. I have asked that the surrounding community be given an opportunity to comment on DPWT proposals before they are finalized.

Briggs Chaney Road East of US 29 – Construction to widen Briggs Chaney Road from US 29 east to Gentry Ridge Court will begin in early 2003. The project is divided into two sections: 1) reconstruction of Briggs Chaney Road as a four-lane, divided, closed-section roadway from Automobile/Castle Boulevards to Aston Manor Drive; and 2) improvements of Briggs Chaney Road from Aston Manor Drive to Gentry Ridge Court as a two-lane, undivided, closed-section, arterial.

This project includes a sidewalk along the north side, a new Class I Bikeway on the south side from US 29 to Olive Branch Drive, and streetscaping between the project's western limits and Robey Road. Streetlights will be provided for both this project and the Briggs Chaney Curve Improvement project.

Construction is expected to be completed in Fiscal Year 2004.

Fairland Road – Conceptual engineering continues for reconstructed three-lane Fairland Road east of US 29 to Briggs-Chaney Road. A public information meeting is planned for early fall. For information, contact the project manager, Michael Mitchell at (240) 777-7262.

Greencastle Road – Reconstruction from 400 feet south of the Robey Road intersection to Greencastle Ridge Terrace (approximately 2,100 feet) is in preliminary design. Construction is expected to begin in 2005.

US 29 Sidewalks – This project, which was first approved in 1998, to include the construction of five-foot sidewalks along both sides of US 29 has been changed due to budget constraints to construction of sidewalks on the east side of US 29. This project is planned to provide sidewalk from Lockwood Drive north to Burnt Mills Avenue and from Lorain Avenue to Crestmoor Drive and to provide missing sidewalks links on the east side of Lockwood Drive from US 29 to New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650). Retaining walls and guardrails will be used to reduce impacts to adjacent homeowners and increase pedestrian safety. Construction should begin this summer following the acquisition of all necessary rights-of-way and the relocation of any utilities. Call Rebecca Park at (240) 777-7263 with any questions about the section from Burnt Mills Avenue to Lockwood Drive. Wayne Christiansen at (240) 777-7195 is the overall project manager.

White Oak Transit Center

– The technical feasibility study for this project has resulted in recommendations for improvements to the existing bus stops along Lockwood Drive and New Hampshire Avenue for the short-term. Long-term facility planning will resume when demand and events warrant. FDA may develop a joint facility with Montgomery County on the FDA site. The project manager is Rob Klein at (240) 777-7195

The State Highway Administration (SHA) is planning to improve the following intersections:

US 29 @ Randolph Road

– SHA has begun construction of a grade-separated interchange. Construction will occur in phases and slightly to the north of the existing intersection in order to allow traffic to continue to move through the intersection during construction. Night work is planned. I have requested that SHA consider landscaping and berms to reduce noise impact both during construction and when the interchange is complete.

US 29 @ MD 198 – SHA has scaled down the size of the grade-separated interchange being considered for this location. Blackburn Road is no longer being considered part of this interchange. The grade-separated interchange will be constructed as part of relocated US 29. The first phase of road construction has begun with utility reconstruction.

US 29 @ Briggs Chaney Road – SHA is in the detail design stage on this grade-separated intersec-

tion. Construction is planned for Fall 2003. Melinda Peters is project manager for all three of the US 29 grade-separated interchanges. She can be reached at SHA at (410) 545-8772.

Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) and Aspen Hill Road - Intersection widening is in final design stage, with construction planned for late 2003. SHA plans to install triangular concrete islands at Adrian Street coupled with “No Left Turn” signs at Adrian Street/Baltic Avenue to prevent cut through traffic. The project engineer, Colbert Stephen, can be reached at 1-888-228-4945 ext. 8899 or cstephen@sha.state.md.us. I am also working to have a Rock

Creek hiker-biker trail pedestrian bridge built over Veirs Mill Road as part of this project.

Georgia Avenue (MD 97) @ Norbeck Road (MD28) – SHA is studying a grade-separated interchange at this intersection. A design hearing is planned for this fall. SHA project manager is Sue Rajan at (410) 545-8514 or (800) 548-5026.

Georgia Avenue (MD 97) @ Randolph Road – SHA is designing a grade-separated interchange with Randolph Road below Georgia Avenue (MD 97). I did not support the recommended design because of

its impact on pedestrians. Because of the close proximity of the project to Glenmont Metro Station, SHA is investigating ways to enhance pedestrian access and safety. SHA project manager is Wesley Mitchell at (800) 548-5026 or email him at: Wmitchell@sha.state.md.us.

Briggs Chaney Road @ Old Columbia Pike – SHA is enlarging this intersection in connection with the US 29 grade-separated interchange. The Planning Board has required that this intersection be rebuilt to conform to Upper Paint Branch Special Protection Area (SPA) criteria limiting imperviousness.



Drew Elementary School students offers Councilmember Marilyn Praisner the phone at an event announcing the school's new gymnasium and expansion of all-day kindergarten there.